

Moving On UP

TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN FOR YOUNG CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Prepared by
The Transition Subcommittee
of the
Vermont Early Childhood Work Group
JANUARY 2003





ABOUT MOVING ON UP

Moving On Up is the second booklet in a two-part series on transition for young children with special needs. We developed these booklets to help families prepare for educational changes that happen as their young child gets older. In the first booklet, *Moving On*, we discuss the transition from Family, Infant and Toddler services to Essential Early Education. *Moving On Up* focuses on the next transition a child will make into kindergarten.

When children enter kindergarten, families play a vital role in making sure their child is successful. With suggestions from parents, we designed *Moving On Up* with specific pages for photos and information sharing, marked Parent Page. We also included checklists, fact sheets and resources. In getting ready for the move to kindergarten, we hope parents will use this booklet as a planning tool.

Moving On Up was created by the following members of the Transition At Age Three Subcommittee of the Early Childhood Workgroup and the Vermont Parent Information Center. For information about obtaining a copy of the booklet *Moving On*, contact Kathy Andrews, 802-828-5115.

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*This publication was printed with the generous support of the
Vermont Department of Education.*

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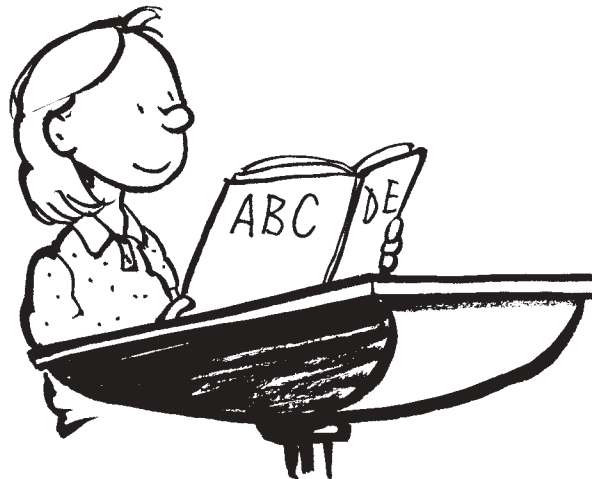
INTRODUCTION

Common sense and experience tell us how important it is for children to feel at ease and happy on their first day of kindergarten. Entering kindergarten will be a new experience and may require adjustments on your child's part. Your five or six year old with special needs may also need more time to settle into the routines of public school.

Parents may also need time to adjust to their child's move from preschool to kindergarten. You may experience a range of emotions when your young child walks through the school doors for the first time. You may have questions about special education and what kindergarten services will look like.

Transition planning will help you and your child navigate the move to kindergarten more easily and successfully. Effective transition planning requires teamwork among parents, educators and others. Working together, the team will pave the way for your child with special needs to feel welcome and capable in kindergarten.

Remember, getting there is the first step. Like your child, it will take you time to learn the ins and outs of elementary school.



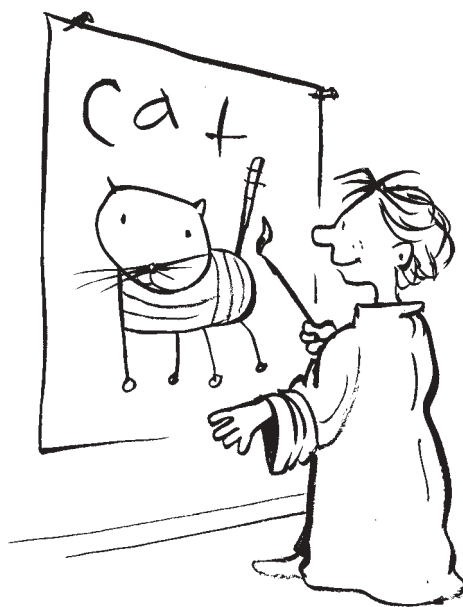
GETTING STARTED

Your child is entering kindergarten. Perhaps you've planned your young child's transition from Family, Infant and Toddler services to Essential Early Education (EEE). As a result, you feel like you have a good idea about what to do and who will be involved in your child's move to kindergarten. Maybe you're new to the idea of transition planning. You have many questions and want some guidance along the way. Whether you have experience or are a newcomer to transition planning, this booklet can help you organize and prepare for your child's next steps.

Transition planning is done as part of your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). You and the professionals who work with your child can use the IEP to identify the supports your child needs in preparing for kindergarten and once he or she is in school. Planning can help your child adjust to school faster and have more opportunities for learning and making friends.

Teachers recommend starting the process up to a year before your child enters kindergarten. Beginning early will give your child's team more time to work on transition activities and make changes when things don't work out as planned. Follow up is important. A mid-year meeting of the IEP team is a good idea. You can review your child's progress and any changes that need to be taken.

It's time to get started. On the following pages are questions to help you identify information you want the team to know about your son or daughter. Teachers use similar questions when they screen children for kindergarten.





PARENT PAGE

Each member of the team may have a different picture of your child's strengths and needs. Because you know your child better than anyone else does, the information you share helps the team get a good handle on how to support your son or daughter in kindergarten.

Doing this activity can help you focus on the information you feel is most important to your child's success in school. Bring your notes to a meeting and give copies to members of the IEP team.

What does your child enjoy doing the most?

What does your child do best?

How does your child learn best?

What are your goals, hopes and dreams for your child in kindergarten?



Does your child need help with dressing, using the bathroom or other self-help skills?

How does your child express frustration or discomfort?

How does your child comfort him or herself?

What special health or medical needs does your child have?

Who are the special people in your child's life?

What are your child's favorite foods and what foods won't your child eat?



Does your child have any allergies, sensitivities, or safety concerns?

Other information you want to share with your child's team:



PARENT PAGE

Photos are a good way to introduce teachers and other new team members to your child. Show your child at different ages, at play and spending time with your family.

The form contains five rectangular boxes, each with a light gray border and dark gray corner tabs. Each box is intended for a photo and contains the text "PLACE PHOTO HERE".

- Top-left box: Tilted to the left.
- Top-middle box: Upright.
- Top-right box: Tilted to the right.
- Bottom-left box: Upright.
- Bottom-right box: Upright.





SKILLS FOR KINDERGARTEN

Parents often ask about the skills their children need in order to learn, make friends and feel good about themselves in kindergarten. Using this list will help you identify your child's strengths and the areas in which he or she may need extra help.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS

- ☐ Expresses emotions and affections appropriately
- ☐ Plays cooperatively, shares toys and materials
- ☐ Respects others and their property
- ☐ Interacts and defends self without being aggressive
- ☐ Takes turns, participates appropriately in games
- ☐ Is willing to try something new
- ☐ Follows class rules and routines
- ☐ Lines up and waits appropriately
- ☐ Sits appropriately
- ☐ Plays independently

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- ☐ Communicates own needs and wants
- ☐ Follows two to three part directions
- ☐ Initiates and maintains interactions with other children
- ☐ Modifies behavior when given verbal feedback
- ☐ Asks peers or teachers for information or help
- ☐ Follows group instructions
- ☐ Relates ideas and experiences
- ☐ Answers questions

TASK-RELATED SKILLS

- ☐ Pays attention to teacher in a large group
- ☐ Follows directions in small or large group
- ☐ Finds materials needed for tasks
- ☐ Doesn't disrupt peers during activities
- ☐ Complies quickly with teacher instructions
- ☐ Replaces materials and cleans up work space
- ☐ Monitors own behavior, knows when a task is done
- ☐ Makes choices
- ☐ Stays in own space
- ☐ Follows routine during transition times
- ☐ Seeks attention appropriately

SELF-HELP SKILLS

- ☐ Feeds self independently
- ☐ Cares for own bathroom needs
- ☐ Avoids dangers and responds to warning words
- ☐ Recognizes when a problem exists
- ☐ Solves problems
- ☐ Locates and cares for personal belongings
- ☐ Takes outer clothing off and puts it on in a reasonable amount of time

Adapted from Teaching Exceptional Children and Kindergarten Transition Reference Guide, Success by Six Transition Guide Committee, Bennington, VT, 1999.

GUIDELINES FOR TRANSITION PLANNING



Where to start and what to do are questions parents ask when confronted with the task of planning for their child's transition to kindergarten. Your school may have written procedures for transition planning which include activities and timelines for team members to follow. If your school doesn't have a written plan, a good model to follow was prepared by the University of Vermont, Center for Disability and Community Inclusion.

The TEEM Manual contains information for families and educators about planning the transition to kindergarten. It describes practices that work for families and schools, contains sample forms and gives examples of useful activities.

THE TEEM APPROACH TO EFFECTIVE TRANSITION PLANNING

STEP 1: Provide families with information, support and the opportunities to enable them to participate as equal partners in planning their child's transition

Every opportunity should be provided to assist you in gaining the information you need to partner with educators in planning your child's transition. Whether it's answering questions or describing kindergarten routines and services, educators play an important role in helping you feel like a welcome and respected

part of the planning process. Meetings should be held at times and places that are convenient to you as well as the school team and as often as you may need.

STEP 2: Plan the transition from Essential Early Education to kindergarten and elementary school in a systematic, individualized, timely and collaborative way

Many individuals are invested in your child's success in kindergarten. Through the IEP process, you will work with preschool and kindergarten teachers, therapists, administrators, health professionals and others. The planning process should happen in an organized and timely way and activities should be carried out in a collaborative manner with everyone taking their part.

STEP 3: Provide children with opportunities to learn developmentally appropriate skills which promote their successful transition to kindergarten and regular education environments

To be successful in kindergarten, young children with special needs should learn skills that will enable them to fit in socially, communicate well, carry out tasks and take care of their needs. If your child needs extra help in any of these areas, he or she should have opportunities to gain skills before entering kindergarten. During the planning process, the team should discuss the skills your child needs to learn.



STEP 4: Prepare to successfully include and educate the child in kindergarten and elementary school

The role of the elementary school is to prepare for your child's arrival in kindergarten. Preparation includes identifying steps to help your child with special needs be part of the regular kindergarten, which may include adapting the classroom environment or teaching approaches. Your child may have to visit the kindergarten classroom more than once in order to feel comfortable in this new setting. The kindergarten teacher may need to observe your child in his or her preschool program.

STEP 5: Provide services to promote and support the child's placement and education in kindergarten and elementary school

The support and services your child will need to be successful in kindergarten should become part of the IEP. Any classroom accommodations, modifications or aids your child requires should be listed on the IEP as well. It will be important to keep track of how well your child is doing during the first few months of kindergarten and if necessary to make changes in the IEP.

Adapted from TEEM: A Manual to Support the Transition of Young Children with Special Needs and Their Families from Preschool into Kindergarten and Other Regular Education Environments, Center for Disability and Community Inclusion, University Affiliated Program of Vermont, University of Vermont, January 1991.



PARENT PAGE

After reading the guidelines taken from the TEEM Manual, think about the information, activities, skills and individuals that will be important in planning your child's move to kindergarten.

1. What information do I need and who should I contact about the transition planning process and kindergarten?

2. How will my child's transition from EEE to kindergarten happen and who will be involved?

3. These are the skills I would like my child to learn in order to be successful in kindergarten academically and socially.

4. Here are some things the school could do to prepare for my child's arrival.





5. What services and support will my child need to promote and support his or her education and placement in a regular kindergarten class?

6. Other comments

CECILIA'S KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION PLAN



Here's an example of how one family planned their daughter's transition from Essential Early Education to kindergarten. Cecilia, who has Down syndrome, was six years old at the time. Your child's transition plan should be based on his or her unique needs and strengths.

January

- Develop transition team made up of parents, preschool teacher, Essential Early Education teacher, kindergarten teacher, learning specialist, speech and language pathologist and principal
- Review progress made toward reaching current IEP goals and objectives.

February

- Hold meeting to begin creating a transition plan.
- IEP team decides that Cecilia would receive speech twice a week to prepare her for kindergarten. They also discuss summer services and the need for classroom support.

March

- Kindergarten teacher and the speech language pathologist observe Cecilia at preschool. The school psychologist also observes Cecilia at preschool and childcare.

April

- Kindergarten teacher, speech language pathologist and the learning specialist attend a conference on Down syndrome to learn teaching strategies to use in kindergarten and the childcare setting.

June

- Cecilia begins receiving summer speech services.
- Team reviews evaluation report with the school psychologist.
- Team discusses how classroom aide will be used.
- Transportation is set up.
- Team sets meeting schedule of every two weeks.
- Parent sets up weekly phone calls with teacher.

August

- Cecilia attends two-week summer program at elementary school.
- Parent speaks to new teachers about Down syndrome.
- Cecilia's kindergarten program is finalized.

September

- Cecilia attends kindergarten.
- School transports Cecilia to childcare after school.
- Team feels her program is working and she is making progress.
- Team pulls loose ends together and will meet in October.



SCHOOL ACTIVITIES TO PREPARE CHILDREN FOR KINDERGARTEN

Vermont schools carry out a variety of activities to help children get ready for kindergarten. Here's a list of some things your school may be doing. You can discuss any of these activities with the IEP team in planning for your child's transition.

- The kindergarten teacher visits the preschool, childcare or parent child center.
- The school district holds kindergarten screening.
- The teacher makes home visits to each new student.
- The school holds an open house for kindergarten families.
- The kindergarten teacher makes telephone calls to all kindergarten parents.
- Parents and children visit the kindergarten classroom.
- The school holds a day when kindergarten children attend school for part of the day.
- Kindergarten students and their parents receive welcome notes.
- A special kindergarten registration day is held.
- Kindergarten students have a chance to practice riding on the bus.
- Families receive an information packet about kindergarten.
- The school district sponsors a kindercamp during the summer.

QUESTIONS PARENTS OFTEN ASK



You may have questions about special education when your child enters kindergarten. Because every public school's procedures may be different, ask IEP Team members to explain how special education will work in kindergarten. In some schools, for example, the principal may attend IEP meetings and play a decision-making role. The special education director may participate in IEP meetings and make decisions in other schools. Although schools may use different methods, every school must follow the special education rules required by federal and state laws.

Here are some questions parents frequently ask about special education.

If my child has an IEP, how do I register for kindergarten?

Registration for kindergarten usually occurs in the spring. Talk to your child's IEP manager to find out how registration is done in your school district or contact the elementary school.

What are the differences between Essential Early Education and special education in kindergarten?

Essential Early Education (EEE) is the term used to describe special education and related services for children three through five years old. In kindergarten, your child will receive special education services based on the IEP. These services may be provided in a different way than in EEE, such as in a small group. The setting in which your child receives services may also be different. Ask questions about service delivery and the options available to meet your child's needs when you meet with your child's team.

How will my child's speech services be provided in kindergarten?

Every school works differently. Your child

may receive speech in the kindergarten class or in a separate room. The IEP will describe how and where your child receives speech services and will be tailored to your child's individual needs. As a member of the IEP team, you can share your ideas about what will work best for your child.

Who will be my child's IEP manager?

Most often a special educator or speech path- ologist will be your child's IEP or case manager.

Will my child be able to get summer services in kindergarten?

To determine if your child needs extended school year services, the IEP Team will review whether your child will lose skills over the summer that he or she will have difficulty relearning in a short time. They must also look at other areas, such as whether a summer program is needed to help your child reach goals, how your child's disability affects progress toward goals and if there are areas of your child's program that need ongoing attention. You can request an IEP meeting if you believe your child



will need summer services. It's usually a good idea to start the discussion in January.

How can I make sure my child gets the accommodations he needs?

The IEP should list the accommodations your child will receive in kindergarten. As a member of the team, you can request specific accommodations for your child. Other team members may or may not agree with you. If the team doesn't agree, you have certain rights to disagree that are listed in Vermont's Parental Rights form.

Can I observe in my child's classroom?

Many schools welcome parents in the classroom to observe their child. It's a good idea to speak to the principal to find out how you would go about visiting your child's kindergarten class. Some parents become classroom volunteers, which gives them many opportunities to observe their child.

How will communication happen between my child's teacher, the IEP team and me?

Good communication between parents and teachers is an important part of a successful kindergarten experience. Talk to members of your transition planning team about a process for home-school communication. You should be able to work something out with your child's teacher and the IEP team that is mutually agreeable.

Who will make the decision regarding my child's kindergarten class?

Each school district has procedures for

kindergarten class placement. If you believe your child needs a specific teacher, discuss your concerns with the school principal and the IEP team. The final decision rests with the school district.

How will the curriculum be adapted to meet my child's needs and who is responsible?

At an IEP meeting, the team will talk about any changes to the kindergarten curriculum your child may require. Kindergarten lessons will be adapted depending on your child's educational and developmental needs. Your child's special educator is responsible for adapting the kindergarten curriculum, and the kindergarten teacher may also be involved in revising lessons for your child.

How will the kindergarten teacher include my child in her classroom?

Transition planning is the time to discuss how your child will be included in elementary school. Specific activities should be developed to help your son or daughter succeed in a regular kindergarten class. To prepare your child, kindergarten readiness skills can be taught ahead of time.

What can I do to make sure the teacher understands my child's medical condition and learning needs?

Use the worksheet in this booklet to share written information with the kindergarten teacher. You can also ask your child's EEE teacher and physician to attend an IEP meeting. Establishing a communication routine with the kindergarten teacher will enable you to talk about your child's needs on a regular basis.

UNDERSTANDING SPECIAL EDUCATION



What is special education?

In 1975, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) was passed to guarantee a free, appropriate public education to children with disabilities. Today this law is called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA governs the way states must provide special education to eligible children ages 3 through 21 (Part B of this Act.) It also includes the Family Infant and Toddler Program, which funds states to serve children birth through 2 years of age (Part C of this Act).

Special education is instruction that is specifically designed to meet a child's individual needs and is provided to the child at no cost to parents. Special education includes preschool or classroom instruction, instruction in a resource room or special class, home instruction, or instruction in a hospital or residential setting and physical education.

To help a child benefit from his or her special education, the child may receive related services such as speech therapy, physical therapy, transportation, counseling, audiology services and more. Assistive technology devices or services may also be provided as part of a child's education program.

What does the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) require?

The IDEA requires schools to:

- provide a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) to children who are eligible for services
- find, identify and evaluate children who may have a disability (child find)
- use a variety of tests and measures in evaluating a child
- develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for a child who is determined eligible for special education, including where the child will receive special education services (placement)
- educate children in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for that child
- include parents as equal partners in the special education process
- follow safeguards that protect parents' rights in the special education process, including the right to disagree with school decisions



RESOURCES

Your school district's special education administrator

Information about special education and parental rights. Contact your superintendent's office to find out the name and telephone number of this individual.

Vermont Department of Education, Essential Early Education Consultant

Assistance for families and schools regarding Essential Early Education and parental rights. (802) 828-5115

Association for Cerebral Palsy (ACP)

Support for people with cerebral palsy and other physical disabilities. 1-800-639-1930

Autism Society of Vermont

Information and support regarding children and adults with autism. 1-802-457-1675

Children with Special Health Needs (CSHN), Child Development Clinic (CDC), Department of Health

Specialized medical care for children with special health needs, including evaluation and follow up. 1-800-660-4427

Family, Infant and Toddler Project

Support services for infants and toddlers who have a developmental delay or health condition and their families. 1-800-870-6758

Parent Child Center Network

Assistance and education to families with very young children. 1-802-388-3171

Parent to Parent of Vermont

Support and information network for families with children who have a chronic illness, disability or who have been born prematurely. 1-800-800-4005

Vermont ARC

Support for individuals with mental retardation and their families. 802-658-2221

Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI)

Information, support and instruction for children and adults who are blind or visually impaired. 800-639-5861

Vermont Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Support for students and education teams in the public school setting. 802-258-9500 (v/tty) Austine School, Brattleboro

Vermont Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

Assistance for families of children experiencing an emotional, behavioral or mental health challenge. 1-800-639-6071

Vermont Parent Information Center (VPIC)

Support for families of children with special needs regarding their child's education, development and special needs. 1-800-639-7170

GUIDING CONCEPTS ON TRANSITION



- ◆ Transitions should be viewed as an ongoing process rather than a single event.
- ◆ Transition planning should begin early and ensure sufficient time dedicated by all involved.
- ◆ Transitions involve changes for the family as well as the child.
- ◆ The family's dreams, concerns, values, culture, language and experiences should be elicited, listened to and honored.
- ◆ Those planning transitions must keep in mind the child's and family's strengths, needs and preferences.
- ◆ The family must be encouraged and supported to take an active role in helping to plan their child's transition.
- ◆ The family should be assisted in understanding how services and supports will be provided in the next environment.
- ◆ A planning process must be developed that is outcome based, written, followed and clearly understood by all.
- ◆ A collaborative spirit and partnership among all is to be promoted.
- ◆ Coordination must be enhanced, alleviating duplication and overlap of services and efforts.
- ◆ Regular contact among all team members must be assured.
- ◆ Confidentiality for all parties concerned is respected.
- ◆ A comprehensive plan is based on the child's and family's unique situation, not on labels or programs.
- ◆ The number of changes, settings, evaluations and new people that a child and family experience as a result of transition should be kept to a minimum.
- ◆ When necessary, the child and family will be linked with naturally occurring supports and activities available in their own community. When none exist, they are created.
- ◆ Children should be included and supported in community environments with their peers.
- ◆ All existing strengths and resources of families, programs and communities will be examined and utilized.
- ◆ Statewide equity and access to transition processes and resources for all children and families should be promoted.

*Developed by the Transition Committee,
Early Childhood Workgroup*





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